Reminiscences on typhoid fever *

by

Dr. Adolpho Lutz

The foregoing paper gives an account of observations on typhoid fever, made in Switzerland, Germany and Brazil, during a series of 30 years ending in 1908. During this time the ideas about typhoid fever and its treatment varied considerably but its prognosis was little affected by the changes in treatment. Diagnosis and observation were made easier by the introduction of clinical thermometry. The treatment of fever by quinine in larger doses and cold baths lost some of its supposed value by the recognition that the elevation of temperature was not the most important feature of the disease and its reduction by the more efficacious modern antipyretics had no curative effect. The idea of a miasma arising from the subsoil had to give way on the recognition of the germ and by its bacteriological characterisation the diagnosis became always more secure. In due time the phenomenon of agglutination came to help the diagnosis, which can be made from a few drops of blood without even seeing the patient. The cultivation of the germ and its demonstration in microscopical slides grew gradually easier and with it the differential diagnosis of typhoid fever also. The epidemics due to the infection of drinking water had long been known in Switzerland and were also observed in Brazil by me and others. Infection through flies was less readily admitted and only the relatively late recognition of apparently healthy carriers of the typhoid germ explained the frequency of sporadic cases.

From the years 1894 to 1908 the Bacteriological Institute in São Paulo, of which I was director, made 90 post-mortems of S. Paulo fever, besides a great number of agglutination tests. In the same period malaria, which does not occur in the capital, was carefully studied in the state of S. Paulo. It was thus made quite clear by us that there was no malarial element in the cases of severe and protracted fever, which were so common in S. Paulo as to make the capital one of the most pronounced endemic foci. They were known

* Summary on the article published in portuguese in Mem. do Inst. Oswaldo Cruz, anno 1936, vol. 31, n. 4, pp. 851-865.
as S. Paulo fevers and wrongly attributed to malaria. The bacillus of enteric typhus was frequently isolated and the cultures were certified as such by Eberth, the discoverer of the germ. It was a long and weary task to convert the medical class to the new idea, but gradually the incorrect diagnosis of malarial fever disappeared from the obituaries and was substituted by that of typhoid fever.